

ETHIOPIA

THE ETHIOPIAN REVOLUTION

(TASKS, ACHIEVEMENTS,

PROBLEMS

AND

PROSPECTS)

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INTRODUCTION :

After age-old oppression under an archaic autocratic and monarchical rule, the Ethiopian people rose in revolt in February of 1974. Although of a spontaneous nature at its inception, the revolution involved millions of peasants, workers and other working peoples and progressives and began to shake the then existing feudo-bourgeois system at its foundation. Within eight months, the absolute monarch, Haile Selassie had been overthrown and with him had also come to an end the vicious system of feudal monarchy. In September of 1974, followed the establishment of the Provisional Military Administrative Council which has since then been playing a leading role in the on-going Ethiopian peoples revolution.

In what follows, a brief outline of the Ethiopian revolution will be presented for reference purposes. The fundamental tasks and the major achievements of the revolution, its basic problems and prospects will be dealt with.

A. Fundamental tasks

As outlined succinctly in the *Programme of the National Democratic Revolution of Ethiopia*, the fundamental tasks of the Ethiopian Revolution at this stage are:

"To completely abolish feudalism, imperialism and bureaucratic capitalism from Ethiopia and with the united effort of all anti-feudal and anti-imperialist forces build a new Ethiopia and lay a strong foundation for the transition to socialism.

Towards this end, under the leadership of the working class and on the basis of the worker-peasant alliance and in collaboration with the petty bourgeoisie and other anti-feudal and anti-imperialist forces, establish a people's democratic republic in which the freedom, equality, unity and prosperity of the Ethiopian peoples is ensured, in which self-government at different levels is exercised and which allows for the unconditional exercise of human and democratic rights."

History of revolutions in general and that of Ethiopia in particular does clearly show that, a revolutionary process is a long and an arduous process. The above tasks therefore are tasks only accomplishable through a long and relentless struggle against both internal and external exploiting classes and enemies of the masses. The abolition of feudalism, imperialism and bureaucratic capitalism from the Ethiopian society and the establishment of a people's democratic republic will not only require the determined fighting efforts of its broad masses but would also require and benefit from the complimentary efforts of socialist countries and other progressive societies. Such major and necessary tasks as the formation of a Worker's Party, formation of a broad democratic front, a move towards the tackling of such problems as the Nationality question, the

woman question, the question of religion, the question of democratic rights, the Eritrean question, etc. have to begin in order to accomplish the fundamental tasks outlined in the above quoted minimum programme.

B. Major Achievement

February 1974 was a period in which the Ethiopian situation took a qualitative leap for the worse in all Economic, political and social spheres. The situation in the rural areas was unbearably painful. The peasantry and especially the poor peasantry which in most cases had to give away up to 75% of his produce to an absentee landlord had gone from bad to worse with the acute drought situation. Famine raged throughout many administrative regions scoring heavy tolls on the lives of people, cattle, sheep and goats, camels and draught animals.

In the urban areas, the shortage of food and of Industrial products and commodities and their rising prices adding to an inflationary situation, had made life extremely difficult. This sky-rocketing cost of living had its effect felt in every sphere of activity in the country. The situation in factories and sweat shops, the situation in the armed and police forces, the situation in schools and universities, the situation everywhere and of every class except that of the ruling classes had deteriorated. Prostitution, begging, thieving had overwhelmed the major urban areas. Crises loomed upon crises and change had become an objective imperative. Adequate subjective factors were however not visi-

ble. Nevertheless, the ripeness of the objective factors was such that a spontaneous revolutionary explosion had to take place. Millions of peasants rose and began to defy the feudal production relations. They began to seize the lands which they tilled, forcefully took away such landlord property as grains, draught animals and farm implements. In many areas landlord farms, houses and granaries were burnt down.

In the urban areas teachers stopped teaching, students stopped going to school, transport services were halted. Trade Unions went on strike and revolutionary violence had erupted. The situation within the military was no different. Soldiers' uprisings had begun to take shape in the various divisions and units. A combination of all these rural and urban eruptions had caught the luxury-loving government unaware. The despotic Emperor had to buckle and the Cabinet of Aklilu Habtewold was dissolved. The feudo-bourgeoisie system then began to make frantic moves to foil the incipient revolution at its infancy.

It immediately installed a new cabinet led by another aristocrat, Indalkatchew Mackonen who made numerous promises of reform including a new constitution.

The ruling classes were not yet aware that people wanted revolution and not reform. Several months passed by and the struggle between sham reform and revolution, between the exploiting classes and the exploited classes which objectively continued was reflected in the Armed and Police forces. In view of the obtaining situation, a si-

tuation in which there was no organized progressive force or party, leadership had to inevitably come from the organized armed and police forces. This was a historical necessity given the Ethiopian realities of the time. Accordingly in June 1974, the *Derg* was created as the Coordinating Council of the Armed Forces, the Police and the National Army.

In less than three months, the *Derg* had taken rapid and calculated moves to win over the broad masses and isolate the feudo-fascist despot. The frantic moves of the Indalkatchew cabinet had come to no avail and by September the Emperor had been overthrown. The Coordinating Council had become the Provisional Military Administrative Council and the Provisional Military Government had been established. The overthrow of the Monarchy in general and that of Haile Selassie's in particular was a landmark in Ethiopian History. It was a great beginning for the destruction of feudalism in Ethiopia and this historical event ushered in a new era — an era of revolution and liberation for all the oppressed of the Ethiopian society.

Once the Monarchy was brought down, major revolutionary steps were taken in succession that put Ethiopia on the road of the National Democratic Revolution. First, the *Derg* proclaimed Socialism as the guiding principle of the revolution and with this, hitherto unknown propagation of socialist science began flooding the country. Translation of classical Marxist-Leninist Literature in various Ethiopian Languages was encouraged and a cul-

tural revolution in literature, art and education had begun. A *Zemetcha*, the National Work Campaign which sent 60,000 high school and university students, teachers and soldiers was organized.

Soon after the Youth had established themselves in Rural areas, the famous Land Reform Proclamation was issued. This proclamation nationalized all rural land and brought the rural exploitation of man by man to a halt. This socialization of land eliminated the old private ownership which allowed for the sale, exchange or inheritance of land and established a system of use-right only. By this, peasants were made only to pay nominal taxes on the land they individually or collectively used. Such a drastic measure — the nationalization of all rural land was a measure that was necessitated by the concrete realities of the Ethiopian society.

The land holding system in the country was so complex that in one administrative region alone there obtained up to one-hundred land tenure systems. In most parts of the South, south-west, south-east and parts of central Ethiopia, up to 85% of the rural population lived under a burdensome system of tenancy. Another 10% or more of the population had modest land holdings. This meant then that most of the land was owned by a handful of tyrant land lords. In addition, the Ethiopian land lord neither had any revolutionary potentialities nor had it any knowhow as regards production. Such a land lord was absolutely parasitic and had therefore to be gotten rid-off.

In most parts of the North and part of central Ethiopia, what obtained was an age-old holding system which allowed only for use-right. This system however brought about the division of land to a geometric retrogression and thereby became a fetter on agricultural production. A major portion of the society had to spend most of its time in courts; and family feuds prospered — a serious cause for decreased productivity, which had by the outbreak of the revolution reached serious proportions. The socialization of land therefore, brought an end to the long-drawn court cases and family feuds and took the already existing use-right concept to a higher level.

Privately owned commercial farms were also nationalized or socialized by the Land Reform Proclamation. This again was a correct measure since the major commercial farms were owned by Imperialists. In cases where Ethiopian nationals ran commercial farms, these were strongly tied with imperialism and the Land Reform Proclamation was also justified.

Another major achievement of the Ethiopian Revolution was the bringing of major industries, banks, insurance companies and finance institutions under government control. An overwhelming majority of these were imperialist enterprises. The nationalization of urban land and extra houses was another achievement of the Ethiopian revolution. This was also a revolutionary measure necessitated by the concrete realities of the country. Urban land speculation and real estate business had reached such high proportions

that the housing problem had become acute. It was mostly the land lords, the bureaucratic bourgeoisie and other comprador elements that monopolized urban land and housing. These reactionary sectors of the society who had already been hit by the socialization of all rural land had begun to resort to counter-revolutionary activities by using their urban based property. Such counter-revolutionary moves had to be halted and one good method for achieving this was the separation of these elements from the means of production which they owned. Another factor that necessitated the urban land and extra houses proclamation was the rising and absurdly non-uniform house rent. After the proclamation, rents have been reduced and further studies are underway to establish a uniform and fair system of house rent. In addition it must be noted that the middle strata which owned its own houses had not been affected and those who had no other means of income but house rent have been allowed to draw reasonable sums of monthly compensation.

Another and significant achievement of the on-going Ethiopian revolution was the establishment of the Provisional Office for Mass Organizational Affairs, (POMOA). The main task of this state institution is to help raise the revolutionary political consciousness of the broad masses and help in organizing the masses. It is also entrusted with encouraging and giving moral and material support to progressive political organizations that adhere to the programme of the National Democratic Revolution of Ethiopia.

Todate, POMOA has opened up a political school where worker, peasant, soldier and intellectual cadres are trained. It has also opened up branch offices in all the administrative regions, Awrajas and most of the Woredas. It is actively spreading socialism in the factories, among the peasant-associations and other institutions. POMOA also participates in sending workers, soldiers and intellectuals for cadre training to friendly socialist countries.

Just recently, the Provisional Military Administrative Council has reorganized itself in a new structure. The new structure was necessitated to fit in with the new situation and it will enable the Derg to lead the democratic revolution effectively. The structure will allow for better control of bureaucratic sabotage and other counter-revolutionary activities. In the new structure there has also been set-up a special commission of the Central Committee that looks after the Revolutionary Politicization of the Armed Forces and the Police. In the last two years, military cadres have been trained both at home and abroad. These have been assigned as political cadres in the various units of the Armed Forces and the Police. This has contributed to a rising political consciousness of the military.

Successes have been scored in other spheres of social, economic and political activity. The problems of school shortage and the acute speculation obtaining in the private school sector has been wiped out. The sons and daughters of the broad masses had difficulty of going to school be-

cause of soaring school fees. Now, a proclamation has brought all schools under public control and this has enabled the poor to send their children to school. The peasant associations and the urban dwellers associations are now building thousands of schools throughout the country in cooperation with the government.

Recently a new Note, the *Birr* has replaced the old note. The change has brought a halt to illegal hoarding and illegal accumulation of notes abroad. By so doing, the reactionaries were trying to remove a large sum of notes out of circulation to bring about a monetary crises.

In the two years since the revolution erupted, the life of most of the rural masses had improved a great deal. Most peasants now have enough food to eat and enough money to purchase basic commodities. The political awareness of the broad masses has undergone great changes and a rising index in this sphere is easily observable. Such in brief are the major achievements of the on-going Ethiopian Revolution.

C. Basic Problems

Where there is revolution, there is counter-revolution, where there is success, there is failure and where there are achievements, there are problems. This is the inexorable law of Dialectics. The Ethiopian revolution is no exception and it has its problems. Below are presented only some of the basic problems.

1. Reactionary Organizations

Feudalism, Imperialism and bureaucratic capitalism are the three principal enemies of the Ethiopian People. The various proclamations that separated the exploiting classes from the means of production which they owned were as said earlier necessitated by the concrete realities of the society. These then in turn reflected upon the class struggle and made it more acute. Feudal and reactionary bourgeois forces have been reorganizing since the outbreak of the revolution. The so-called Ethiopian Democratic Union (E.D.U.) is an organized counter-revolution. Imperialist countries and some neighbouring states have furnished both moral and material support. Right now, E.D.U. forces are operating out of the Sudan in a reactionary offensive against the ongoing Ethiopian peoples revolution in the regions of North-West Ethiopia. Imperialism and reactionary feudo-bourgeois states have not only limited themselves to help organize this union of Aristocrats — the E.D.U. They also serve as the mainstay of other reactionary feudo-bourgeois forces like the so-called Eritrean Liberation Front, so-called Tigrain Liberation Front, the so-called Oromo liberation front and the so-called Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party (E.P.R.P.). The main difference between the E.P.R.P. and the other forces of counter-revolution is that the E.P.R.P. has tried to wear a Marxist garb. It is notoriously known for its revolutionary phrase flaunting — a basic characteristic

of Trotskyites. The E.P.R.P. engages in individual assassinations and lumpen-type gangster terrorism — a characteristic of Anarchists.

All these forces are now actively operating from within and without Ethiopia. The major sectors of reactionary infiltration by armed counter-revolutionaries is from the North-West on the border with the Sudan, and from the South-East on the border with Somalia.

II. Problems of Organizing the Masses

The last two years has seen intensive activities at organizing the broad masses. In the rural areas more than 21,000 peasant associations have been formed. In the urban areas hundreds of urban dwellers' Associations have already been set-up. After a long and arduous struggle, the All Ethiopia labour union has recently been formed. Women's Associations, Youth Associations and Professional Associations are also being set up.

Such mass organizing is not however without its problems. Reactionary forces, especially the E.D.U. and the E.P.R.P. infiltrate these associations and try to raise havoc. Where they are successful, they form totally counter-revolutionary associations and where they are not successful they struggle to liquidate the associations. They disrupt schools and universities and try to create disorder throughout the country. Such has been their tactic and this still poses serious problems to the revolution.

III. The Question of Nationalities and Religion

The inequalities that obtained between the scores of nationalities of Ethiopia is one of the serious problems facing the Ethiopian revolution. While it is known that the question of nationalities is part of the general question of the class struggle, local and foreign reactionaries have tried and still try to transform the ongoing class struggle into a struggle between nationalities.

Section II, article 5 of the Programme of the National Democratic Revolution of Ethiopia has clearly stated its position in solving the question of nationalities. The Programme states that based on the Marxist-Leninist principle, it recognizes the right of all nationalities to self determination and adds that "no nationality will dominate another one since the history, culture, language and religion of each nationality will have equal recognition in accordance with the spirit of socialism."

The Programme recognizes that the Marxist-Leninist principle of self-determination has two aspects — the recognition of the right aspect and the exercise of the right aspect. Following this principle, studying the world situation and the concrete realities obtaining in Ethiopia, the Programme further advances the form in which the exercise of the right must take in Ethiopia today — namely Regional Autonomy. The concept of Leninist Regional Autonomy has been tested in several socialist countries —

first and foremost in the Soviet Union and has proved its correctness in the solution of nationality contradictions.

The two major religions in Ethiopia are Christianity and Islam. Under the old system, the state was a christian state, but now religion has been left to the individual and the state has been made secular. This solved the age-old oppression of other religions save christianity. Nevertheless reactionaries, especially the imperialist organized and backed E.D.U. and the so-called E.L.F. have done and are doing every thing to split the country along religious lines. Although this will remain a significant problem for sometime, it is certain that such divisive tactics will come to no good end.

IV. The Eritrean Problem

The so-called liberation fronts in Eritrea have shown major vascillations in the formulation of the Eritrean problem. One says that it is a nationality question as well as a question of religion. Another says that it is a colonial question — Ethiopia being the colonizer of Eritrea. It is so clear that even a rapid glance at the Eritrean region, at the various nationalities inhabiting it, at the various religions obtaining in it and at its history will show that the Eritrean problem is not as stated by the reactionary secessionists.

The ongoing National Democratic Revolution has clearly revealed that the Eritrean problem is part of the general democratic revolution. It is a problem left behind by the imperialists and indeed there are problems of nationalities, problems of religions and other problems within the Eritrean region. On May 16, 1976, the Provisional Military Government taking note of the particular conditions prevailing in the Eritrean region made a Policy Declaration to solve the problem in a peaceful way. Instead of responding to this peaceful initiative in a like manner, reactionary forces have instead stepped up their activities supported by outside forces of expansion and reaction.

V. Problem of the South-East

After the various proclamations and especially the Land Reform Proclamation, Land Lords and Reactionary elements have gone into Somalia. Most of these elements after having obtained same form of military training and arms have infiltrated back into the South-East region of Ethiopia. They commit acts of sabotage. They mine roads and bridges. They disrupt peasant associations and kill revolutionary peasant leaders. They burn villages, farms and engage in looting activities. The same bandits claim to be the fighters of the so-called Western Somali liberation front among the Somali nationality. Among the Oromo nationality these same counter-revolutionaries claim to be fighters of the so-called Oromo liberation front and among

the Amhara nationality they try to pass for E.D.U. or monarchist elements.

VI. Problem of Militia Organizing

The revolution of a people is an act of the people themselves. The defence of the revolution then is also primarily that of the people. Endeavours have been made and are also underway to organize a strong peoples-militia for the defence of the revolution. Most of the peasant associations have now their own defence units. Defence units are also being set up in and around factories and within urban dwellers' associations. The major problem facing the revolution with respect to militia organizing is the lack of arms. With well armed counter-revolutionaries operating in the country, it is imperative that defence units of the broad masses be armed. In this regard, the Provisional Military Administrative Council is doing its best trying to satisfy the arms needs of the broad masses for the defence of the revolution and the consolidation of their gains.

VII. Problems of Economic Sabotage and Commodity Shortage

Economic Sabotage is one of the standard practices that counter-revolutionaries and imperialists resort to during revolutionary times in revolutionary societies. The Ethiopian revolution is no exception, and in this respect,

there is an ongoing systematic economic sabotage in all sectors of Agricultural and Industrial production and distribution.

In the rural areas, reactionaries disrupt farming, spread vile propaganda that discourages and threatens peasants. They struggle to keep agricultural produce away from the urban centres there by creating an artificial grain shortage. Urban and rural reactionaries also engage in grain hording thus worsening the situation. Counter-revolutionary merchants and bureaucrats also actively sabotage the distribution of basic commodities to the rural areas thus trying to win over the rural masses to their side.

In factories, production is seriously hampered by slow-downs, attempted strikes and other forms of sabotage. Salt, sugar, etc. . . are dumped in engines and rocks, wood are put in machines thus halting production. In state farms, agricultural produce are not harvested on time, those harvested are not stored well or distributed on time. Agricultural machinery are systematically rendered unfunctional. Cattle are not fed properly and are made to die in large numbers. Last year alone several scores of million Birr worth of agricultural produce, machinery and cattle were destroyed through sabotage.

Import-Export enterprises also engage in economic sabotage in collusion with international imperialism. Flooded with imperialist, E.D.U. and E.P.R.P. propaganda, workers in some imperialist countries had at times even

refused to load grain and commodity cargoes destined for Ethiopia. Such in brief is the concerted effort of local and foreign reactionaries at economic sabotage.

VIII. Some Social Problems

Since the February (1974) revolution erupted, due to the famine situation rural masses had migrated to the cities. These have not been accommodated in the main. In addition to this, economic sabotage has also created a sizeable quantity of unemployed. As a result, unemployment is one of the serious problems facing the revolution.

Effects of natural disasters (drought, flooding, blight etc.) such as famine and homelessness are other social problems obtaining at this time. These are being combated through relief and rehabilitation measures and settlement projects.

Prostitution is another serious problem which has been inherited from the past. The disruption of schools by reactionaries has contributed to an already growing lumpen population. The Provisional Military Government is now working towards the solution of these problems by opening up job opportunities in public works, state farms, rehabilitation centres and rural settlement projects.

IX. Problem of Party Building

It was the great leader of the world proletariat Lenin, who incisively taught about the necessity of a strong party

of the working class for conducting a revolution successfully. It was in pursuance of this revolutionary teaching that section III, article 2 of the minimum programme stated :

"The National Democratic Revolution of Ethiopia will be assured of victory if all anti-feudal and anti-imperialist forces unite in a broad revolutionary-front. Therefore, all progressive forces will be accorded the freedom to organize and be organized in political parties and in mass organizations as a step towards establishing such a united front. But since, final victory by such a united front is only assured when a true proletarian party is organized, strengthened and assumes the full-leadership of the front, the government will extend unceasing assistance to revolutionary groups and individuals struggling to establish such a vanguard party".

In accordance with the above, all revolutionary groups and individuals, will struggle for the realization of what is paramount to the ongoing Ethiopian revolution — the creation of the workers party of Ethiopia.

With regard to the problems of the Ethiopian revolution much more could be articulated but these are the basic ones.

D. Prospects of the Ethiopian Revolution

The Ethiopian Revolution has an infinitely bright future. With the untiring efforts of the progressive section of the Dergue, all genuine progressives and revolutionary

Marxist intellectuals, the day for the establishment of the Workers Party of Ethiopia is coming nearer and nearer. This is the most urgent task of the revolution at this stage and efforts without let-up will be made in his respect.

The other and future prospect of the Ethiopian revolution is the formation of a broad democratic front. This broad democratic front is a revolutionary front of all anti-feudal and anti-imperialist forces. The necessity for the formation of this front and its fundamental task has been clearly stated in section IV of the minimum Programme in the following terms :

"As soon as the masses are properly organized and a popular revolutionary front is formed, an assembly which will assume state power will be established. Such an assembly will consist of representatives of parties and popular organizations that have participated in the front... In accordance with the constitution that such an assembly will approve the people's Republic of Ethiopia, under the leadership of the working class party will be declared."

Aside from the above-mentioned party formation, front formation and the establishment of the People's Democratic Ethiopia, other political prospects entail formations of mass organizations such as an All-Ethiopia Association of Peasants, an All-Ethiopia Association of Youth, an All-Ethiopia Association of Women and various other professional associations.

Plans and studies are also underway to make democratic rights available for the broad masses and for genuinely

progressive forces. The creation of a Nationalities' Institute that will help in the scientific study of Ethiopian nationalities and the implementation of autonomy is underway.

The prospects for economic growth, especially of the agricultural sector and light industrial sector are very high. The country has vast resources for agriculture and livestock rearing. It has rich supplies of rivers and lakes. But the socio-economic basis for the exploitation and utilization of these resources are very weak. It must be remembered that the Ethiopian society obtains not only a backward feudal socio-economic system and an imperialist imported weak capitalist mode of production but also strong remnants of the primitive communal socio-economic system and even slave trading. This situation will definitely not only slow down the rate of economic development and especially of its industrial sector but will also make it quite difficult. What is therefore necessary is the broad mobilization and politicization of the working masses to revolutionize productivity, the rapid training and deployment of conscious cadre and good central planning. In addition, proletarian-internationalist aid from socialist countries will augment and accelerate this rate.

Already a number of agricultural, livestock and irrigation projects are underway and more are under study. Intensive work shall begin in the search and the exploitation of mineral, crude and gas resources. It has often been said that Ethiopia's geothermal energy potentialities are

immense. Efforts shall also be made in this direction. The recently established National Science and Technology Commission has as one of its major tasks the study, invention and creative adaptation of appropriate technologies. Traditional science and technology shall serve as a treasure house in this regard.

Such socio-economic ills as unemployment, prostitution, illiteracy, abject poverty, lack of adequate health services, lack of adequate schools and institutions of higher learning will have no place in future Ethiopia. The welfare of orphans, abandoned children, disabled people, patriots and of old people shall be ensured. Victims of natural disasters shall be provided with appropriate relief and rehabilitation measures.

In the international sphere, Democratic Ethiopia shall play a more active and more determined role in the struggle to wipe out imperialism and all its cohorts — colonialism, racism, and Apartheid. The working masses of Ethiopia shall surely unite with the workers and oppressed peoples of the world to wipe out the system of exploitation of man by man.